

HR system upgrade will bring cost-savings to state, convenience to employees

The state's PeopleSoft human resources and financial systems are slated for big improvements, and as the agency responsible for their operation, GTA is leading the effort.

The systems will be upgraded in two separate projects beginning with the Human Resources Management System (HRMS) this September. The current HRMS became operational in October 1999 with PeopleSoft Version 7.02, which the company no longer supports. GTA will replace it with the latest release of Version 8, and the upgrade is scheduled to be completed in November 2004.

"With the upgraded version, we'll be able to avoid some of the costs we now incur," said Sherrie Southern, director of GTA Financial Systems, which runs the state's human resources and financial systems. "At the same time, we'll make the operating environment simpler for users and provide state

employees with convenient, self-service options."

Since the new version works over a secure Web site,

- agencies won't need to invest in new computers because users only need a browser,
- no executable files will be stored on users' computers, resulting in less need for technical support,
- employees will be able to update their own personal information, such as address changes, freeing human resources staff from clerical tasks,
- employees with direct deposit will get their paycheck vouchers through a secure Web site.

Eliminating printed paycheck vouchers for employees with direct deposit will save the state over \$86,000 annually in printing costs, Ms. Southern said. The use of online vouchers is a growing trend at leading companies throughout the nation.

Long distance rates fall by 70 percent

Welcome news for state and local government agencies facing tight budgets: Your July telephone bills will reflect significantly lower charges for long distance calls. The new reductions – up to 70 percent overall – apply to in-state, interstate and international calls.

For example, the in-state rate between call zones will drop to 3.1 cents/minute, and the interstate rate will go down to 3.5 cents/minute. The surcharge for calling card calls has been eliminated.

The reductions were made possible in part by GTA's recent dismantling of the obsolete transport network that supported the old GIST dialing system (8+1) and awarding a new contract for within-zone calls. GTA has undertaken a review of all telecom rates, the first total review in three years, and hopes to obtain additional long distance reductions later in the fiscal year after renegotiating contracts. Charges for local service are also under review. ■

Agencies won't incur any direct costs

The upgrade will be financed entirely through the Universal Service Fund. Although the fund was established to support distance learning and telemedicine, the General Assembly passed GTA-supported legislation during this year's session allowing it to be used for statewide information technology projects for the next three years.

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*Bringing the benefits of technology
to Georgia government*

Telecom task force report calls for flexibility, procurement changes

The Governor's Telecommunications and Technology Task Force presented its findings in June, and GTA is already implementing many of its recommendations.

"The report reinforces changes we initiated early this year to better enable GTA to respond not only to telecommunications but also to the general IT needs of state agencies and the state as a whole," said Tom Wade, acting GTA executive director and state chief information officer.

The Governor appointed the task force in February to review telecommunications policy and identify a "manageable and sustainable approach" to outsourcing. The task force listened to testimony from dozens of representatives from state agencies, industry providers, associations and GTA.

The report noted that "long delays caused by waiting for completion of the CCOP process have serious consequences for the state." CCOP—Georgia's Converged Communications Outsourcing Project—was designed to outsource and upgrade state government's telecommunications and information technology services. The project was cancelled earlier this year when only a single bidder remained.

The task force made additional determinations.

- Using a revised approach to procuring telecommunications and computing services should yield considerable long-term savings to the state and greater operational efficiencies.
- By building in flexibility to match systems with agency needs, state government can improve productivity.
- Through strategic use of contracting policies, the strengths of private industry can complement those of state government.

Making progress

Work is under way on several issues raised in the report.

Establishing a more collaborative relationship between GTA and state agencies, with regular agency input. Several months ago, GTA adopted a different, federated approach to engaging state

agencies in strategic IT activities. The membership and responsibilities of the Agency Heads Advisory Committee have expanded. GTA also has begun formal discussions with agency program directors about their business priorities and customer needs to ensure they are supported by IT and addressed by the state's enterprise architecture.

Seeking a better balance between standards and flexibility in the procurement process. GTA's revised technology review policy delegates authority to each agency for approving technology initiatives

that cost less than \$50,000.

These technology initiatives are no longer subject to prior GTA review and approval, but they should continue to comply with GTA policies and standards to ensure compatibility with the network.

The procurement process will foster competition and cost saving. Where it's economical, GTA will outsource specific operational tasks. Outsourcing initiatives will be incremental with reasonable contract periods.

Enhancing reliability and choice. With input from agencies, GTA is analyzing how it delivers services. The analysis may lead GTA to discontinue some products and services, bundle or package others, or introduce new ones.

Agencies will get an easy-to-use product catalog offering a range of choices when vendors' products differ significantly in function and cost. Agencies will be able to choose the solution that best meets their needs.

In other areas, such as long distance service, GTA will pursue a statewide contract that maximizes the state's purchasing power. In June, GTA announced reductions of as much as 70 percent in long distance rates for all state agencies (see story on page 1).

A good start

"We've made a good start toward meeting the task force's recommendations," Mr. Wade said. "We will continue working with the Governor's office and state agencies on priorities and implementation." ■

"The report reinforces changes we initiated early this year."

Tom Wade
Acting GTA Executive Director

A win-win-win situation: GTA helps Fulton County evaluate IT upgrade



Fulton County taxpayers were among the winners when GTA recently helped Fulton County's tax assessor and tax commissioner update their 1980s-era tax systems.

The systems handling tax assessments and tax billing needed to be replaced. Since these two systems didn't share a common database, information was entered twice whenever a change in assessment and tax billing occurred.

"They were in dire need of a technological refresh," said Fulton County CIO Robert Taylor.

Fulton County's tax assessor system is the largest in Georgia, handling 270,000 properties. The tax commissioner has more than 270,000 accounts, billing \$1.4 billion annually for personal and real property.

The county's IT department recommended an upgrade of the system using the current vendor and integrating assessments and tax billing.

County commissioners wanted an outside opinion. Mr. Taylor contacted several consulting companies, but none could meet the county's tight deadline. Having partnered with GTA before, Mr. Taylor contacted Tom Wade, GTA's acting executive director, about reviewing the IT department's recommendation. On May 20, a GTA team with Robert Woodruff, Bruce Brownlee, Martha Hazelton and Jody Chambers went into action to provide a timely assessment.

"They met with us for a detailed review," Mr. Taylor explained. "Following the meeting, they researched other options and possible solutions, assessed the value of our current systems and developed a very thorough and comprehensive report."

"We've been very satisfied with our partnership."

**Robert Taylor
Fulton County CIO**

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Steering committee provides oversight

GTA also coordinated the appointment of a steering committee to provide executive oversight of the HRMS upgrade. The steering committee is made up of representatives from the following offices and agencies:

- Office of the Chief Operating Officer
- Office of the Chief Financial Officer
- Office of Planning and Budget
- Department of Audits and Accounts
- Georgia Merit System
- Employees Retirement System
- Department of Human Resources
- Department of Natural Resources
- Georgia State Patrol

A separate steering committee will be formed to oversee the upgrade of the financial system. This phase of the upgrade is expected to begin in early 2004.

What's next?

The next step is selecting a vendor to help plan and implement the upgrade. GTA issued a

Request for Proposal in June to find a vendor to assist with planning and implementing the HRMS upgrade. Responses were due July 10 with the final selection expected in August. The vendor is scheduled to begin work in September. Then, the GTA-led project team will spend up to four weeks planning every phase of the upgrade.

Coming later this year are details about training on the upgraded system for HRMS users. In addition, top management in state agencies will be kept informed about the upgrade's progress on a regular basis, and details about status reports will be announced after the vendor begins work. ■

What GTA Financial Systems does for you

GTA operates the PeopleSoft human resources and financial systems, which manage

- payroll checks for 65,000 state employees
- retirement checks for 45,000 retirees
- a database of 85,000 active members of the Employees Retirement System
- benefits processing for more than 100 agencies
- 1099s and W2s for more than 70 state entities
- processing of payments to 100,000 vendors

GSA Schedule 70 gives agencies more options, buying power

State agencies now have more choices and greater buying power when it comes to purchasing computers and related products.

Online Resources

GTA's Web site provides complete information on using the GSA Schedule 70 and other sources. In the hardware contracts section, you'll find:

- General information
- Procedures for using enterprise contracts
- Links to hardware contracts

www.gta.georgia.gov/procurement

For the first time, agencies can make purchases with the General Services Administration (GSA) Schedule 70, a catalog of vendor contracts originally developed for the exclusive use of federal agencies. Congress voted to allow state and local governments to use the

federal catalog of contracts beginning last May.

With this newest option, agencies can choose from among three highly competitive sources: GSA Schedule 70, GTA-negotiated statewide contracts and the Western States Contracting Alliance. If an agency finds a better deal on the same equipment from another source, they can simply request an exception to using one of these sources.

Complete details about enterprise contracts, links to contracts and frequently asked questions are posted on GTA's Web site at www.gta.georgia.gov/procurement. Click on Enterprise Contracts then look under Hardware Contracts. ■

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Fulton County's outdated systems didn't share data, Mr. Brownlee said. They relied on technology that is being phased out and would not be supported by the vendor within a year because they hadn't been upgraded.

GTA's final report supported Mr. Taylor's recommendations, and the Board of Commissioners approved them.

The upgrade will result in a Web-based system using a single consolidated database and technology that has become Fulton County's standard, said Mr. Brownlee.

As an added benefit, he said, Cobb County has already upgraded some of its systems using the same vendor, enabling Fulton County to take advantage of the work already done on state-mandated tax reports. The upgraded system will be easier for employees to use and require less train-

ing. It will eventually allow taxpayers to access the department over the Internet.

Fulton County's choice of GTA to provide this assessment was significant, said Ms. Hazelton. "This is not a service GTA has marketed, but we have people with the information and background to do it."

Mr. Brownlee agreed. "This sets a precedent where GTA is ready, willing and able to help county governments."

As for Mr. Taylor, he said GTA was able to validate that spending money to upgrade systems can reduce the costs of providing essential taxpayer services.

"We have been very satisfied with our partnership," said Mr. Taylor. ■

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